

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ATHENS 13387 171742Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07
LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03 NSC-05
PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 /094 W
----- 047072 /71

R 171650Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8357
INFO USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USMISSION GENEVA

UNCLAS ATHENS 13387

1. THE HALLOWED GREEK CUSTOM OF A DAILY TWO-HOUR SIESTA BREAK MAY BE IN JEOPARDY. LABOR MINISTER LASKARIS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRIVATE EMPLOYEES FEDERATION, THE MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION OF ATHENS-PIRAEUS AND SEVERAL SELF-SERVICE CHAIN STORES SIGNED AN AGREEMENT DECEMBER 13 TEMPORARILY SUSPENDING THE DAILY SIESTA BREAK FOR RETAIL SHOP EMPLOYEES IN THE ATHENS AREA ONLY AND REDUCING THEIR REGULAR WORK WEEK THROUGHOUT GREECE FROM 45 HOURS TO 43 HOURS. WAGE LEVELS, HOWEVER, WILL REMAIN AT THE 45-HOUR RATE. THE NEW AGREEMENT WILL BE INSTITUTED ON A FOUR-MONTH TRIAL BASIS JANUARY 24. DURING THE SUMMER SESSION, BEGINNING MAY 15, THE SIESTA BREAK WILL BE RESUMED IN ATHENS, BUT THE WORK WILL REMAIN AT 43 HOURS. BEGINNING JANUARY 1, 1978 THE SHOP EMPLOYEES' WORK WEEK WILL BE REDUCED TO 42 HOURS THROUGHOUT GREECE. UNDER THE NEW AGREEMENT RETAIL SHOPS MAY REMAIN OPEN UP TO 48 HOURS A WEEK. SIESTA BREAKS WILL BE GOVERNED OUTSIDE THE ATHENS-PIRAEUS AREA BY AGREEMENTS AMONG PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS AND LOCAL FEDERATION AND EMPLOYER'S REPRESENTATIVES

2. PRESSURE FOR THE REDUCED WORK WEEK CAME FROM THE PRIVATE EMPLOYEES FEDERATION, WHICH THREATENED ONE-DAY STRIKES ON DECEMBER 15,

20 AND 28 IF ITS DEMAND FOR AN IMMEDIATE 42-HOUR WEEK WAS NOT MET. THE FEDERATION ALSO SOUGHT UNSUCCESSFULLY TO RESTRICT STORE HOURS TO
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SAME PERIOD TO INSURE THAT ITS MEMBERS WOULD NOT BE COERCED INTO WORKING MORE THAN THE REGULAR WORK WEEK

3. THE ASSOCIATION OF SHIP EMPLOYEES OF ATHENS AND PIRAEUS, A LEFTIST-DOMINATED FEACION REPORTEDLY REPRESENTING APPROXIMATELY

10 PERCENT OF THE FEDERATION'S CLAIMED 19,000 MEMBERS, DENOUNCED BOTH THE AGREEMENT AND THE FEDERATION FOR ACCEPTING A 43-HOUR WEEK IN LIEU OF 42 HOURS AND FOR FAILING TO INSIST ON TYING STORE HOURS TO THE WORK WEEK. LEADERS OF THE ASSOCIATION ORDERED ITS MEMBERS OUT ON WILDCAT STRIKES DECEMBER 15, 20 AND 28. MOSCOW-ORIENTED

RIZOSPASTIS AND OTHER LEFTIST ATHENS DAILIES ON DECEMBER 16 REPORTED THE PREVIOUS DAY'S STRIKE WAS EFFECTIVE, BUT OTHER DAILIES SAID IT HAD LITTLE OR NO EFFECT. EMBASSY SOURCES AGREED WITH THE LATTER ASSESSMENT. THE FEDERATION'S PRESIDENT, LOUKAS GIANNOPOULOS, ESTIMATES THAT APPROXIMATELY 1800 SHOP EMPLOYEES PARTICIPATED IN THE STRIKE AND THAT MANY OF THESE RETURNED TO WORK DURING THE DAY. HE ALSO TOLD US THAT THE PROPOSAL TO LINK STORE HOURS TO THE WORK WEEK WAS A BARGAINING PLOY ONLY AS HE KNEW THAT IT COULD NEVER BE ACCEPTED. SMALL STORE OWNERS FEEL THEY COULD NOT COMPETE WITH CHAINS OR WITH THE LARGER INDIVIDUAL STORES WITHIN SET STORE HOURS

4. THE LABOR MINISTRY'S SECRETARY GENERAL, CONSTANTINE MALATESTAS, TOLD THE EMBASSY'S LABOR REPORTING OFFICER ON DECEMBER 13 THAT OPERATIONAL DETAILS OF THE AGREEMENT, SUCH AS EXTENDED BUSINESS HOURS FOR PHARMACIES, WILL BE WORKED OUT BY A JOINT GOVERNMENT-MANAGEMENT-LABOR COMMITTEE

5. IN ANNOUNCING THE AGREEMENT LABOR MINISTER LASKARIS EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE SIESTA BREAK WILL BE ABOLISHED PERMANENTLY AS A STEP TOWARD BRINGING GREECE'S ECONOMY IN LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL LABOR STANDARDS AS WELL AS HELPING TO CONTAIN ATHENS' TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS. MOST GOVERNMENT AND BANK EMPLOYEES END THEIR WORK DAY IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON. WITH RETAIL SOP EMPLOYEES REMAINING ON THE JOB, ONLY THE EMPLOYEES OF
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PRIVATE BUSINESS WILL BE FREE TO COMMUTE TO AND FROM THEIR ATHENS OFFICES TWICE EACH DAY THIS WINTER.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WAGES, PRESS COMMENTS, BUSINESS FIRMS, RETAIL PRICES, FRINGE BENEFITS, LABOR OBJECTIVES, LABOR STRIKES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ATHENS13387
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760465-0562
From: ATHENS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761231/aaaabakb.tel
Line Count: 100
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: schwenja
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 JUN 2004 by williarl>; APPROVED <30 AUG 2004 by schwenja>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: n/a
TAGS: ELAB, GR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006